**Tapani Hanhisuanto:
Thinning is where operators can show their skills**

**When one has harvested wood for work for a couple of decades, one knows which kind of harvesting one likes best. Tapani Hanhisuanto enjoys thinning, because there he can use and show his professional skills.**

* “I practice, I almost only work in thinning sites. There is challenge for me in those sites, and you can tell who is a professional here”, he says.

According to Hanhisuanto, operators’ skills are truly put to the test in thinning, unlike in clear cutting.

* “The fact is that every operator can cut down all the trees in clear cutting sites”, he says.

In thinning sites, one must also consider the remaining trees and how they will grow, and achieving good results is the main thing. When the site is challenging, skilful operators can also be pleased with their achievement.

* “You get the best feedback from the forest owner, who is happy with the results.”

Among others, Hanhisuanto remembers well one forest owner who had never before done a stumpage sale with machines and who had finally decided to have one test stand done to try mechanised harvesting.

* “And so we did thinning with machines. When we had completed thinning a couple of thousand cubic metres, the forest owner said that he had now changed his views. He said that he could now see that thinning can be done with machines.
* And so we could continue mechanised harvesting on his land.”

**Quantity never replaces quality**

Tapani Hanhisuanto has worked for his current employer Metsäkone Pirinnen for already 15 years. He describes it as an excellent place of work, and he would not easily want to change it even though he has sometimes been bothered by the long journeys to work. Hanhisuanto and his employer share the same idea about good work results and quality.

* “The company has always emphasised that quality is the main priority in harvesting. Quantity never replaces quality. It is a good guiding principle for everyone these days.”

Hanhisuanto also praises his employer for being open to new ideas. There is no resistance to change, ideas are not rejected, and there is a willingness to experiment on new things. This experimenting has included small wood harvesting with multi-stemming, for example.

* “I have had the chance to try out different working methods. I have enjoyed the challenge of trying out which method works best in harvesting.”

 **Energy wood and the bioeconomy play an important role**

Energy wood harvesting plays an important role in balancing the seasonal fluctuations in the sector, which result from the fact that small wood harvesting is mainly done when the soil is not frozen. Therefore, Hanhisuanto ponders whether the Kemera regulations will bring a dark cloud over the otherwise positive future prospects. The use of wood in northern Finland is expected to grow as a result of the new factory project in Kemi.

* “Here in the north, our forests are naturally less dense than in the south. The last time the Kemera regulations were changed, the amount of removed timber was changed from 1,000 frames to 1,500 frames. This made wood procurement more difficult, and there was less work available during the unfrozen soil season. The Kemera conditions can either support the bioeconomy and balance seasonal fluctuations or have the opposite effect.”
* “Here in Northern Ostrobothnia, we have ambitious goals for the restoration of young forests. It means that in harvesting, forests and trees will become smaller, so we will need more operators. Thus, energy wood and the bioeconomy play an important role here.”

**Passion for the field**

It is clear that harvesters are needed. Tapani Hanhisuanto has also worked as an employee representative who evaluates vocational students’ demonstrations. He thinks that the education in the field could be improved.

* “There should be entrance exams that would test the applicants’ motor abilities and assess whether they are truly interested in the field.”

Students should have a passion for the field and machines. They must also be able to handle the loneliness of the operator’s work.

* “Our work is so lonely that not everyone enjoys it.”

**Professional skills are acquired in the forest**

Tapani Hanhisuanto himself has always been interested in machines. His home farm had a natural combination of forest, trees and machines because it had a field circular saw and a planing machine which were used on wood cut from the family’s and others’ forests. He graduated as a forest machine operator in Taivalkoski in 2002.

As a student, he trained in Iinattijärven Metsätyö from his first year of studies. He began to develop his professional skills in real work in the field right from the start.

* “I was more or less a qualified operator after finishing school, because I could see how harvesting is done in the real world. I did not spend many hours on the school’s machines or sites during my studies.”

After military service, Hanhisuanto was hired by Metsäkoneurakointi A. Arposelta in Oulu. The transition from school to the army and to working life was made easier by the journeyman project carried out in northern Finland in the early 2000s by Metsäliitto, Ponsse and machine entrepreneurs. As part of the project, machine entrepreneurs gained possession of Ponsse’s Barbo machine for six months and novice operators could use them to practise their skills. After the training period, the expenses were shared between the entrepreneur, Metsäliitto and Ponsse, and the young operators got a smoother start to their career.

* “With Barbo, I could take my time learning the trade and as a novice operator, I was not under any pressure about the results”, says Hanhisuanto.